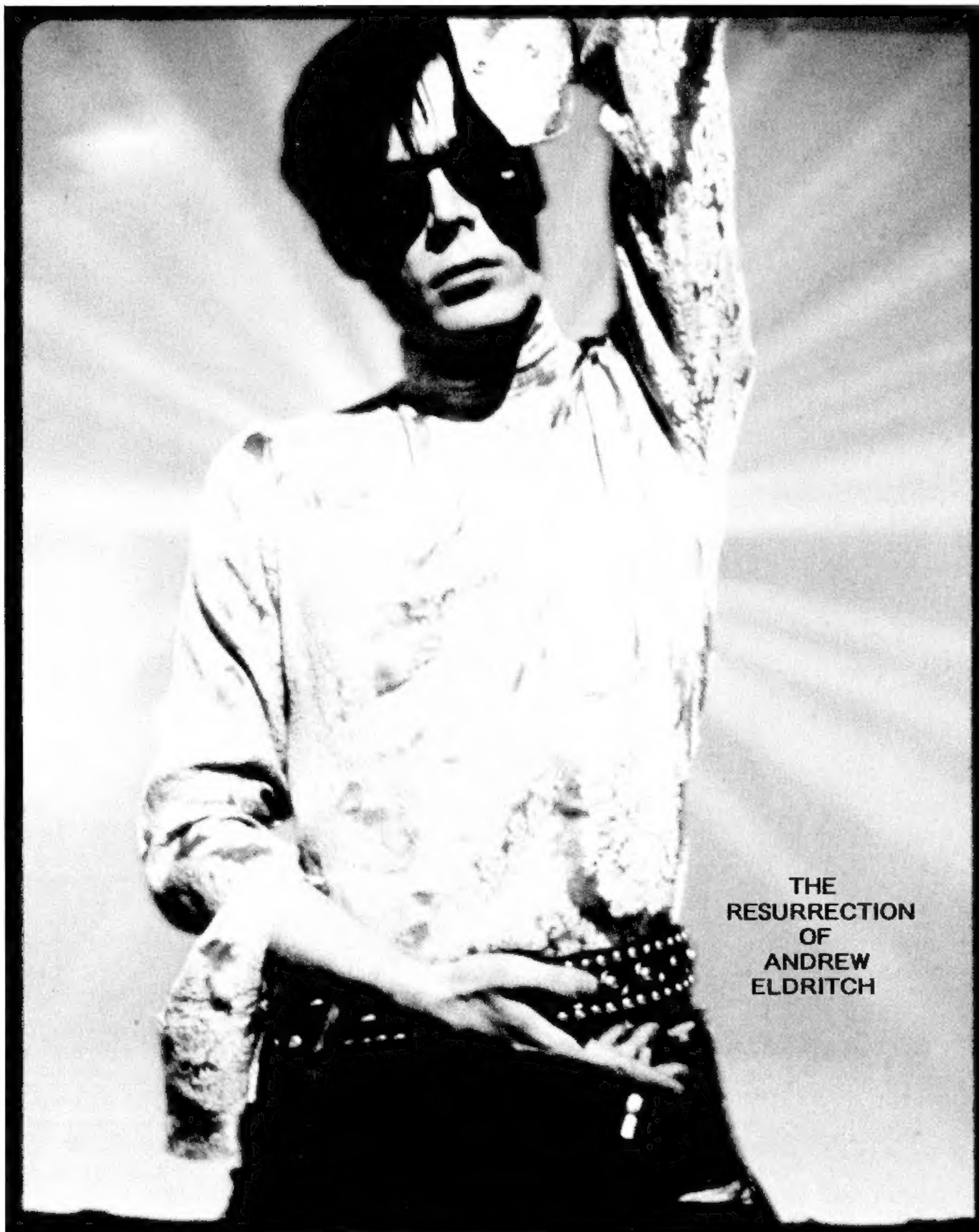


# SISTERS OF MERCY

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THE  
RESURRECTION  
OF  
ANDREW  
ELDRITCH

The landing gear of the British Airways passenger jet touched down on a remote runway of Hamburg's International airport. A mysterious passenger with long, dark hair and sunglasses stared out the window deep in thought. This trip had been long in coming; for years he had been going over this moment in his mind. The passenger was Tony James, the flamboyant guitarist of such legendary rock conglomerates as Generation X and Sigue Sigue Sputnik. His mission there was to meet with the enigmatic, ever-elusive Andrew Eldritch — patron saint of the Sisters Of Mercy.

Andrew had taken up refuge in this industrial German city to regather his forces for another sonic assault on the

music-buying public. One of his recruits had just landed, and the meeting that soon followed flourished into a collaboration — and so the third chapter in the Sisters Of Mercy saga had commenced.

"We had both wanted to work together for a long time," confides Tony James. "Way back in the early '80s, when I was just starting Sigue Sigue Sputnik, I was looking for a lead singer, and someone suggested that I go see a new band called the Sisters Of Mercy. I thought Andrew was very talented and that he came from the same musical roots I did. Obviously, he had no intention then of leaving the Sisters, but we've kept in touch ever since and all along he's sent

me every Sisters record."

Those records spanned nearly a decade and included two Lps — **FIRST AND LAST AND ALWAYS** ('85) and **FLOODLAND** ('87), plus a whole myriad of Eps and 12" singles. Now, with Tony James at his side, Andrew's third installment has been realized — the Lp **VISION THING**.

"We figured that someday, we'd definitely do something together," says Andrew. "It was just a matter of timing. I like working with people I have a lot in common with musically. That's why I also got in touch with Tim [Bricheno, formerly of All About Eve]. We come from the same area, we have mutual friends and have worked with a lot of the same people." Some of which include his ex-bandmates Wayne Hussey and Craig Adams, who went off to form the Mission when the first incarnation of the Sisters fell apart after **FIRST AND LAST AND ALWAYS**. It was widely reported that the break up had not been at all amicable — nor was the break up of the "second" Sisters collaboration — the one between Andrew and ex-Gun Club bassist Patricia Morrison for the **FLOODLANDS** Lp.

"The press distorted those events," claims Andrew. "I had good working relationships with everyone. They just wanted to try other things. The bickering always started after they left. But the English press loved to portray me as this ogre who was impossible to work with." Tony backs Andrew's contention: "Yeah, the English press can't decide who to despise more, me or Andrew. As far as I'm concerned, this is a superstar band now. Everyone has their own personality, and I think that will work towards making the creative process even stronger."

This creative process has lead to the latest Sisters album, **VISION THING**, which is somewhat of a departure from the brooding drone of the previous releases. Some of the songs, like "Detonation Boulevard" and "Doctor Jeep" have a real rock feel to them, while others like "Something Fast" and "I Was Wrong" are slower acoustical pieces.

"There's a lot of different things going on," says Andrew. "We're a lot more diverse now."

"It's a return to our rock roots," adds Tony. "It's sharper and more focused, but it still has that machine-like, earmark Sisters sound." And of course, those characteristic, bellowing vocals of Andrew's are ever present.

"I think this album is more like the first one," says Andrew. "The second was more of a solo project for me. This one is a return to our roots. Also, there's a collection of songs that fit together in a literal way."

Some of the imagery that a few of the songs conjure also have that characteristic, foreboding quality the Sisters have always projected. In particular, the song "Ribbons" is about a sexual relationship between a man and a woman that is immersed in sadomasochism. It is this kind of subject matter that has gotten Andrew Eldritch the label of being sinister, and even cruel.

"First of all, everyone knows that sex has an element of violence in it," retorts Andrew. "They are similar in that they're both essentially aggressive, intimate acts that everyone is fascinated with. It's so pretentious to deny that. As for how people perceive me — it's all so silly. Sure the imagery is dark, but people have to make the distinction between aesthetics and ethics. In fact, that's the only way to survive in this insane world."

"Just because you find something pleasing aesthetically, doesn't necessarily mean you also have to find it agreeable ethically. I think that's the greatest lesson of this century! For instance, take the Nazis. They had by far the best looking uniforms of any military. That doesn't mean I have to agree with what they did. In this Gulf War that just past, I really dug how the stealth bomber looked. I'd love to own one of those babies. Does that mean I'd want to go out and bomb things? It's so absurd. People who can't make that distinction between ethics and aesthetics are just being intellectually lazy and politically safe. And bands that can't



The new Sisterhood (left to right): Andrew, Tim Bricheno, Andreas Bruhn and Tony James.



make that distinction tend to be preachy and sanctimonious. To me, they're as boring as the ideologues from the religious fundamentalist movement."

Andrew's objective views on events in the world stem from his keen sense of history. Most of those who don't have such an insight tend to be historically and politically myopic.

"A lot of what I write is politically aware," adds Andrew. "For instance, 'Vision Thing' is about Bush's Noriega connection and his thousand-points-of-light speech, but it never gets preachy. There's nothing dogmatic about it; I'm just making a statement of fact. Telling your audience how to think just insults them. In this hopeless contemporary culture, those who can't get something out of the aesthetics it produces will go nuts trying to deal with its ethics. The world is so fucked, that holding hands, chanting and lighting candles isn't gonna do shit. You might as well enjoy the imagery."

All this sounds frighteningly similar to the immortal last words of Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando) from "Apocalypse Now": "You have to make a friend of horror."

"Exactly," agrees Andrew. "You have to welcome the end with open arms. That's why I've hidden away in Hamburg, Germany. I can play Col. Kurtz. I've disappeared up the Mekong to hide away among the natives. As far as everyone's concerned, I'm dead."

Not likely anymore. **VISION THING** has ripped through Billboard's Top 100, and the Sisters' North American tour has been nearly a complete sell out. When Andrew talks about the tour, however, there's a sense of misgiving about its success.

"The turn outs have been great so far," says Andrew, "but in a way, that really frustrates me because we never pushed for our full potential. We've played in a lot of the same small venues and clubs that we played in the last time we came here. That's not going to get us anywhere. That's one of the problems with major American record labels — if they don't know what you're about, you're automatically pigeonholed as alternative and you get squeezed into club tours. At least the second leg of the tour has added some more appropriate venues."

...Like the big Radio City Music Hall show here in New York recently. Tony James takes another perspective: "Considering the fact that this is the first time the Sisters have toured in about five or six years, the response has been overwhelming really. There was no way to predict this. I think a lot of people are curious to see what's going on. Every concert has been a sell out, and people seem to know every word and sing along. It's uncanny!"

Being uncanny, it seems, is just business as usual for the Sisters. Which reminds me, I forgot to ask Tony if, when the plane was landing, he didn't feel at least a little bit like Martin Sheen.

end




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